Boogie Woogie Riffs

Boogie-woogie is a style of piano-based blues that became very popular in the late 1930's and early 1940's. Boogie-woogie guitar riffs are based off of that style of playing and are great for really spicing up a basic 12 bar blues chord progression. The basic feel of boogie-woogie riffs are based off of the dotted quarter note, swing feel that is so commonly associated with blues. If we were strumming eighth notes (strict down/up) where each note was equidistant (same distance) from the following note, this would be a very "straight" feel and wouldn't sound very good in blues. However, if we shuffle the beat, it changes the feel of the tune completely. In this case, the upbeats or up strums are hesitated slightly. From a technical standpoint, if an upbeat or up strum is halfway in the middle (50%) of two down beats, then for a shuffle beat we must move that up strum over 75% away from the beat that was just played, and 25% away from the note that follows. This is also known as a dotted quarter note. Adding a dot " ." directly to the right side of any musical note adds an additional half of the value of that note. Confused? Don't be… as I always say, "a riff is worth 1000 words". So listen to the examples and watch the videos associated with these lessons and you will hear exactly what I mean by a shuffle beat.

The following pages include several boogie-woogie riffs that slowly increase in tempo. If you're not able to play them at the prescribed tempo, feel free to slow them down. Any of these patterns can be mixed and matched with different feels, rhythms and turnarounds. Feel free to experiment!!! These examples are meant to open your mind and get you thinking outside the box. If it sounds good, don't be afraid to venture out.

Your practice exercises for this boogie-woogie style is as follows:

Boogie-Woogie Basic (Key of A) - this is the first boogie-woogie riff that I ever played and often times is still my "go to" riff for blues. Remember to not let any strings ring out that are not to be played. This means left or right hand muting and/or accurate picking. Suggested tempo is 90 beats per minute.

Boogie-Woogie Basic (Keys of G and F) - this is the same basic riff as in the key of A, but allows you to play in two new keys. The reach on this one can be difficult at first, but keep trying. You will get it !!! Notice that this is a movable pattern and can be transposed to any key by simply sliding the whole pattern up or down the fret board. Tempo for G is 95 beats per minute. Suggested tempo for F is 100 beats per minute. Yep, I'm speeding you up!

Boogie-Woogie Basic with Turnaround (Key of F) - this riff is the same one as above with the exception of a "turnaround". Notice that this is also a movable pattern. Suggested tempo is 105 beats per minute.

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Boogie-Woogie Variation 1 (Key of A) - this is like the first boogie-woogie basic riff in A with a little melodic variation. Suggested tempo is 110 beats per minute.

Boogie-Woogie Variation 1 (Key of G) - this is also like the first boogie-woogie basic riff in G with a little melodic variation AND you get to play it in an open position. This one is less movable than some of the others but it's perfect for the key of G. Suggested tempo is 110 beats per minute.

Boogie-Woogie Variation 2 (Key of A) - a LOT of changes here!! We are adding thicker chords, a funky little turnaround, second measure plays the 4 chord (instead of staying on the 1), an open E7 chord at the end and a small change in melody (be very precise on this one so that you notice the melody difference). Suggested tempo is 115 beats per minute.

Boogie-Woogie Variation 2 (Key of G) - Again, a LOT of changes here!! We are adding thicker chords, a funky little turnaround, second measure plays the 4 chord (instead of staying on the 1), a movable D7 chord at the end and a small change in melody (be very precise on this one so that you notice the melody difference). Suggested tempo is 115 beats per minute.

Whew!!! There is a lot to practice here. Your ear will get better as you play through these progressions. Your finger dexterity will increase. But the thing that I find most helpful about these riffs, is that they give you more knowledge, patterns and places to go on the guitar.

Are you feelin' the blues yet?

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